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Immediate Release

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Environment Department Receives Approval for Plan to Reduce Haze, Improve State's Air Quality

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) recently received the approval of the State Environmental Improvement Board (EIB) for the Department's plans to improve visibility, reduce haze and better protect New Mexico's air quality. The Regional Haze State Implementation Plan and its associated regulations including a new Smoke Management Plan for the state will take effect before the end of the year. A new Open Burning regulation for the state that will ban the burning of household refuse was also approved. The ban on burning of household refuse will take effect in June of next year.

"These regulations will allow us to better protect New Mexicans' health and defend the vistas that have made our state famous," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "I'd like to thank the EIB for their support in this effort."

The state's plan for combating regional haze includes provisions to reduce smoke, prevent air pollution through energy efficiency, reduce dust from dirt roads, reduce air pollution from industrial sources, reduce pollution from vehicles (mobile sources), create both sulfur dioxide milestones for all sources and a backstop trading program and other measures to reduce haze-producing air pollution.

"New Mexicans' health and their quality of life will be improved because of these changes," said EIB Chairwoman Gay Dillingham. "These regulations will eliminate emissions of cancer-causing dioxins from trash burning and encourage other sustainable practices like making sure material to be burned is dry and promoting other, non-burning options to eliminate waste."

Section 309 of the Federal Regional Haze Rule, a part of the Clean Air Act, requires states to make progress towards returning visibility in national parks and wilderness areas to natural background conditions by 2064. The state's plan complies with this rule and has been determined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to make reasonable progress towards this goal.

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Haze is made up of smoke, dust, moisture, and vapor suspended in air and can impair visibility. The term regional haze means haze that impairs visibility in all directions over a large area. Sources hundreds or even thousands of miles away can contribute to visibility problems at remote locations, such as national parks.

The Department's plan to combat regional haze was approved after a three-day hearing before the EIB.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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